

A  
LETTER  
OF

Mr. *JOHN COTTONS*  
Teacher of the Church in *Boston*,  
IN  
NEVV-ENGLAND,  
TO  
Mr. *WILLIAMS* a Preacher there.

Wherein is shewed,  
That those ought to be received into the  
Church who are Godly, though they doe  
not see, nor expressely bewaile all the  
pollutions in Church-fellowship,  
*Ministry, Worship, Government.*

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Imprimatur, *John Bachiler.*

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A

Letter of Mr. *John Cottons*, Teacher of the  
Church in *Boston*, in *New England*.

*Beloved in Christ,*



Though I have little hope (when I consider the uncircumcision of mine owne lips, *Exod. 6.12.*) that you will hearken to my voyce, who hath not hearkened to the body of the whole Church of Christ with you, and the testimony, and judgement of so many Elders and Brethren of other Churches, yet I trust my labour will be accepted of the Lord; and who can tell but that he may blesse it to you also, if (by his helpe) I indeavour to shew you the sandinesse of those grounds, out of which you have banished yours from the fellowship of all the Churches in these Countries? Let not any prejudice against my person (I beseech you) forestall either your affection or judgement, as if I had hastened forward the sentence of your civill banishment; for what was done by the Magistrates, in that kinde, was neither done by my counsell nor consent, although I dare not deny the sentence passed to be righteous in the eyes of God, who hath said that he that with-holdeth the Corne (which is the staffe of life) from the people, the multitude shall curse him, *Prov. 11. 26.* how much more shall they separate such from them as doe with-hold and separatethem from the Ordinances, or the Ordinances from them (which are in Christ the bread

of life.) And yet it may be they passed that sentence against you not upon that ground, but for ought I know, upon your other corrupt doctrines, which tend to the disturbance both of civill and holy peace, as may appeare by that answer which was sent to the Brethren of the Church of *Salem*, and to your selfe. And to speake freely what I thinke, were my soule in your soules stead, I should thinke it a worke of mercy of God to banish me from the civill society of such a Common wealth, when I could not injoy holy fellowship with any Church of God amongst them without sin. What should the Daughter of *Zion* doe in *Babell*? why should she not hasten to flee from thence? *Zach. 2. 6, 7.*

I speake not these things (the God of Truth is my witnes) to adde affliction to your affliction, but (if it were the holy will of God) to move you to a more serious sight of your sin, and of the justice of Gods hand against it. Against your corrupt Doctrines, it pleased the Lord Jesus to fight against you with the sword of his mouth (as himselfe speaketh, *Rev. 2. 16.*) in the mouthes and testimonies of the Churches and Brethren. Against whom, when you over-heated your selfe in reasoning and disputing against the light of his truth, it pleased him to stop your mouth by a suddaine disease, and to threaten to take your breath from you. But you in stead of recoyling (as even *Balaam* offered to doe in the like case) you chole rather to persist in your way, and to protest against all the Churches and Brethren that stood in your way: and thus the good hand of Christ that should have humbled you, to see and turne from the error of your way, hath rather hardned you then in, and quickned you onely to see failings (yea intolerable errors) in all the Churches and brethren, rather then in your selfe. In which course though you say you doe not remember an houre wherein the countenance of the Lord was darkned to you, yet be not deceived, it is no



new thing with Satan to transforme himselfe into an Angell of light, and to cheare the soule with false peace, and with flashes of counterfeit consolation. Sad and wofull is the memory of Master *Smiths* strong consolations on his death-bed, which are set as a Seale to the grosse and damnable Arminianisme and Enthusiasmes delivered in the confession of his faith; prefixed to the story of his life and death. The countenance of God is upon his people when they feare him, not when they presume of their owne strength; and his consolations are found not in the way of presidence in error, but in the wayes of humility and truth.

Two stumbling blockes (I perceive by your letter) have turned you off from fellowship with us. First, the want of fit matter of our Church. Secondly, disrespect of the separate Churches in England under afflictions, who doe our selves practise separation in peace.

For the first, you acknowledge (as you say) with joy that godly persons are the visible matter of these Churches, but yet you see not that godly persons are matter fitted to constitute a Church, no more then trees or Quarries are fit matter proportioned to the building.

*Ans.* This exception seemeth to mee to imply a contradiction to it selfe, for if the matter of our Churches be as you say godly persons, they are not then as trees unfelled, or stones unhewen. Godlinesse cutteth men downe from the former roote, and heweth them out of the pit of corrupt nature, and fitteth them for fellowship with Christ and with his people.

You object, first, a necessity lying upon godly men before they can be fit matter for Church fellowship, to see, bewaile, repent, and come out of the false Churches.

ches ministry, worship and government, according to  
 Scripturs, *Isa. 52. 11. 2 Cor. 6. 17. Revel. 18. 4.* And those  
 this to be done not by a locall remoovall or contrary  
 practise, &c. but by a deliverance of the soule, under-  
 standing, minde, conscience, judgement, will and affe-  
 ctions.

*Ans. 1.* We grant it is not locall remoovall from  
 former pollutions, or contrary practise, that fitteth us for  
 fellowship with Christ and his Church, but that it is ne-  
 cessary also that we doe repent of such former polluti-  
 ons wherein we have beene defiled and inthrallled.

Wee grant further that it is likewise necessary to  
 Church-fellowship, we should see and discerne all such  
 pollutions as doe so farre enthrall us to Antichrist, to  
 separate us from Christ.

But this we professe unto you, that wherein we have  
 reformed our practise, therein have we endeavoured un-  
 fainedly to humble our soules for our former contrary  
 walking. If any through hypocrisie are wanting here-  
 in, the hidden hypocrisie of some will not prejudice the  
 sinceritie and faithfulnessse of others, nor the Church  
 estate of all.

And that we doe (by the grace of Christ) see and dis-  
 cerne all such pollutions as doe so farre enthrall us to  
 Antichrist as to separate us from Christ; your selfe doth  
 acknowledge in acknowledging the visible members of  
 these Churches to be godly persons; for godly persons  
 are not so enthrallled to Antichrist, as to separate them  
 from Christ, else they could not be godly persons.

*Ans. 2.* We deny that it is necessary to Church-  
 fellowship (to wit, so necessary as that without it, a  
 Church cannot be) that the members admitted there-  
 unto should all of them see, expressely bewaile all the  
 polluti-



pollutions which they have beene defiled with in the former Church-fellowship, ministry, worship, government. If they see and bewaile so much of their former pollutions as did enthrall them to Antichrist, as to separate them from Christ, and be ready in preparation of heart, as they shall see more light, so to hate more and more every false way, we conceive it is as much as is necessarily required to separation from Antichrist, and to fellowship with Christ and his Churches. The Churches of *Iudea* admitted many thousand Jewes that believed on the name of Christ, although they were still zealous of the Law, and saw not the beggerly emptinesse of *Moses* his ceremonies, *Act. 21. 20.* And the Apostle *Paul* directeth the Romans to receive such unto them as are weake in the faith, and see not their liberty from the servile difference of meats and dayes, but still lie under the bondage of the Law, yea he wisheth them to receive such upon this ground, because Christ hath received them, *Rom. 14. 1. to 6.*

Say not, there is not the like danger of lying under bondage to *Moses* as to Antichrist, for even the bondage under *Moses* was such, as if they continued in after instruction and conviction, would separate them from Christ, *Gal. 5. 2.* And bondage under Antichrist could doe no more.

*Answ. 3.* To the places of Scripture which you object, *Isa. 52. 11. 2 Cor. 6. 17. Revel. 18. 4.* we answer, two of them make nothing to your purpose, for that of *Esa* and the other of the *Revelation*, speake of locall separation, which your selfe knoweth we have made, and yet you say you doe not apprehend that to be sufficient. As for that place of the *Corinthians*, it onely requireth comming out from Idolaters in the fellowship of their Idolatry. No marriages were they to make with them: no feasts were they to hold with them in the Idols Temple: no intimate familiaritie were they to maintaine

maintaine with them : nor any fellowship were they to keepe with them in the unfruitfull workes of darkenesse ; and this is all which that place requireth. But what makes all this to prove that we may not receive such persons to Church-fellowship as our selves confesse to be godly, and who doe professedly renounce and bewaile all knowne sinne, and would renounce more if they knew more, although it may be they doe not yet see the utmost skirts of all that pollution they have sometimes beene defiled with ; as the Patriarchs saw not the pollution of their Polygamie? But that you may plainly see this place is wrested besides the Apostles scope, when you argue from it that such persons are not fit matter of Church-fellowship, as are defiled with any remnants of Antichristian pollution ; nor such Churches any more to be accounted Churches, as doe receive such amongst them ; Consider I pray you, were there not at that time in the Church of *Corinth* such as partaked with Idolaters in their Idols Temples? and was not this the touching of an uncleane thing? and did this sinne reject these members from Church fellowship before conviction? or did it evacuate their Church estate for not casting out of such members?

2. Your second objection is taken from the confession of sinnes made by *Johns* Disciples, and the profelyte Gentiles before admission into Church-fellowship, *Matth. 3. 6. Act. 19. 18.* whence you gather that Christian Churches are constituted of such members as make open and plaine confession of their sinnes ; and if any sinnes be to be confessed and lamented, (Jewish, or Paganish) then Antichristian drunkennesse, and whoredome much more, of all such as have drunke of the whores cup, or but sipt of it. And therefore as persons, though godly, are not made fit for the Church, if open drunkennesse or whoredome lie upon them



them, yea on but one act of either, untill conviction, true  
repentance, confession, and renunciation of their wayes  
be discerned; so here.

And yet as if you had grasped more then you could hold,  
you let fall some part of what you had assumed, and doe  
grant, that

Such a confession and renunciation is not absolute ne-  
cessary to the admission of members, (though the want of  
it be a grievous offence) if the substance of true repentance  
be discerned.

*Ans. 1.* If such a confession and renunciation be not of  
absolute necessity to the admission of members when the  
substance of true repentance is discerned, then such Congre-  
gations may be true Churches (by your owne confession)  
who doe admit for their members such godly persons as doe  
professe and hold forth the substance of true repentance, for  
such persons professing their repentance for all their  
knowne and open sinnes, doe withall professe their readi-  
nesse to repent of and forsake whatloever further sinnes shall  
be discovered to them.

*Ans. 2.* When you judge that godly persons are not mat-  
ter fitted for the Church, untill first they be illuminated and  
convinced of the sinfulness of every sipping of the whores  
cup; you take away with the one hand what you granted  
with the other, and withall you impose a burthen upon the  
Church of Christ, which Christ never required at their  
hands nor yours.

For we deny that it is necessary to the admission of mem-  
bers that every one should be convinced of the sinfulness of  
every sipping of the Whores cup; for every sipping of a  
drunkards cup is not sinfull, and though the cup of the  
whore doe more intoxicate the mind then the drunkards cup  
doth the body, yet you know bodily drunkenness and

whoredome are such notorious and grosse sinnes that no man that hath any true repentance in him, cannot but bee convinced of the sinfulness of them, and of the necessity of repentance of them in particular. But the Whores cup being a mystery of iniquity, the sinfulness of it, is nothing so evident and notorious as that every true repentant soule doth at first discern the filthiness of it: and therefore as those three thousand Jewes and Profelytes were admitted into the fellowship of the first Christian Church, when they repented of their murder of Christ, although they never saw nor confessed all the superstitious leavenings wherewith the Pharisees had bewitched them, *Act. 2. 37 to 47.* so doubtlesse may such godly persons be admitted into the fellowship of our Churches, who doe truly repent and confesse their greatest and most notorious sins, although they be not yet convinced of every passage of Antichristian superstition, wherewith they have beene defiled in their former walkings.

The Disciples of *John* (whom you instance in) did indeed confesse their sinnes, the Publicans their sinnes, the Souldiers theirs, the People theirs, but yet it doth not appeare that they confessed their Pharisaicall pollutions, but rather the notorious sinnes, incident to their callings, as did also those Gentiles of whom you speake, *Act. 19. 18, 19.* Conjurers confessed their curious Arts, and others their deeds, but whether all their deeds, is not expressed.

*Ans. 3.* But to satisfie you more fully. (and the Lord make you willing in true meeknesse of Spirit to receive satisfaction) the body of the members whom we receive, doe in generall professe, the reason of their comming over to us was, that they might be freed from the bondage of such humane inventions and ordinances as their soules groaned under, for which also they professe their hearty sorrow, so far



as through ignorance or infirmity they have beene defiled. Besides  
in our daily meetings, and especially in times of our solemne hu-  
miliations, we generally all of us bewaile all our former pollutions,  
wherewith we have defiled our selves, and the holy things of God,  
in our former Administrations and Communions, but wee rather  
choose to doe it, than to talke of it, and wee cannot but wonder  
how you can so boldly and resolutely renounce the Churches of  
Christ, for neglect of that, which you know not whether they have  
neglected or no, and before you have admonished us of our sinfulness  
in such neglect, if it be found amongst us.

*Object. 3.* Your third Objection is taken from *Hag. 2. 13, 14, 15.* a  
place which you desire may be thoroughly weighed, and that the  
Lord would hold the scales himselfe. The Prophet theretels the  
Church of the Jewes, that if a person uncleane by a dead body, touch  
holy things, those holy things become uncleane unto him, and so,  
saith he, is this Nation, and so is every worke of their hands, and  
that which they offer there is uncleane. And this (as you conceive)  
argueth that even Church Covenants made, and Ordinances pra-  
ctised by persons polluted through spirituall deadnesse and filthinesse  
of Communion, they become uncleane unto them, and are pro-  
phaned by them.

*Ans.* Now surely if your selfe had hearkned to your owne desire,  
and had thoroughly weighed the Scripture, and had suffered the Lord  
to have held the scales himselfe, you would never have alledged this  
place to your purpose. Your purpose was to prove that Churches  
cannot be constituted by such persons as are uncleane by antichristi-  
an pollutions, or if they be so constituted, they are not to be com-  
municated with, but separated from: To prove this you alledge  
this place; when the Prophet acknowledgeth the whole Church  
of the Jewes to be uncleane, and yet neither denyeth them to be a  
Church truly constituted, nor stirreth up himselfe or others to se-  
parate from them.

If you say, why but they were uncleane? Answer, be it so, but were  
they therefore no Church truly constituted, or to be separated from?  
yea did not *Haggai* and *Zachary* themselves communicate with them,  
and call others also to come out of *Babell* to communicate with them,  
even whilest *Josua* the High Priest was still polluted with his unclean  
garments, *Zec. 2. 6, 7.* with *6. 3. 8. 3.* But if indeed you desire to  
know, what upon due weighing of the place, I conceive to be the mea-  
ning of it, you shall finde it to be this; The occasion of the words a-

rise from a worldly distemper, which the time grew upon, all sorts of the members of that Church, who were so farre carryed away with care of their owne outward accommodations, that while every man looked to his owne house, and the seiling of it, the Temple of the Lord and the building thereof was generally neglected of them all, Prince, Priests, and People, whence it was that God neither delighted in their spirituall services, nor in their bodily labours, but left them without a blessing in both, *Hagg. i. 6. to 11.* Now to cleare the justice of Gods proceeding against them in that case, he alledgeth a secondable law for it, out of *Moser*; The former is written in *Levit. 6. 27.* where the Law saith, that a garment touching any holy flesh of the sin. offering should be holy. But if the garment which toucheth holy flesh shall touch other things, as the person that weareth it, or any pottage, or Bread, or wine, or any touch of other common thing, the thing touched is not thereby hallowed by the touch of such a garment.

Againe, there was another Law, that whosoever touched any unclean body, should be unclean seven dayes, and if in that time hee touched the Tabernacle, or the holy things thereof, they shall be unclean, *Numb. 19. 13.* Now (to apply these Lawes to the scope of the Prophet) the touch of a dead body did type out either fellowship with dead workes, as *Ephes. 5. 11.* or dead persons, *2 Cor. 6. 14, 15, 16, 17.* or dead world, *Gals. 6. 14.* but of these three, it was the dead world wherewith Priest and Prince and all the people were at that time generally defiled, in that they tooke more care and paines for worldly conveniences, then for the Lords holy Ordinances. Whereupon according to the answer of the Priest, agreeable to the Law, the Prophet pronounceth them, in the sight of the Lord, all to be unclean.

From both these Lawes, and the Interpretation of them by the Priest, and the application of them by the Prophet, it appeareth that there were two sorts of these people, and both unclean. Some that did not touch the holy flesh, or offerings, but on the outside of their garments onely, to wit, in bodily presence (and the body is but the garment of the Soule) *1 Cor. 5. 4.* and such were all the Hypocrites amongst them: Others were sincere, as worshipping God in firme Truth, as *Zorobabell, Jehoshua,* and many more, but yet now defiled with touching a dead body, that is, with laying hold on a dead world, their worldly accommodations, which made their hearts and hands slow or dead to set forward the Temple worke, and in this condition both



both sorts, their persons, their oblations, their bodily labours, were all uncleane, and found neither acceptance nor blessing from the Lord, till the Lord stirred up the Spirits of them all to addresse themselves more seriously to the Temple worke, *Hag. 1. 12, 13, 14.*

This I take to be the true and genuine meaning of the place, which if you apply to the point in hand, will reach nothing neare to your purpose. Hypocrites in the Church, and godly Christians themselves, whilst they attend to the world more then to the things of God, their persons, their labours, their civill oblations are all uncleane in the sight of God; therefore the Church of Christ cannot be constituted of such, or if it doe consist of such, the people of God must separate from them. You might well have gathered, therefore, the Church of Christ and the members thereof must separate themselves from their hypocrisie, and inordinate love of this world, or else they and their duties will still be uncleane in the sight of God, notwithstanding their Church estate. This collection tendeth to edification, the other to dissipation and destruction of the Church, and of them that wrest blood in stead of milke from the breasts of holy Scripture.

The second stumbling block or offence which you take at the way of these Churches is, that you conceive us to walke betwixt Christ and Antichrist.

First, in practising separation here, and not repenting of our preaching and printing against it in our owne country.

Secondly, in reproaching your selfe at *Salem* and others for separation.

Thirdly, in particular, that my selfe have conceived and spoken, that separation is a way that God hath not prospered, as if (say you) the truth of the Churches way depended upon countenance of men, or upon outward peace and liberty,

*Answer.* 1. In stead of halting betwixt Christ and Antichrist, wee conceive the Lord hath guided us to walke with an even foote betweene two extreames; so that we neither defile our selves with the remnant of pollutions in other Churches, nor doe wee for the remnant of pollutions renounce the Churches themselves, nor the holy ordinances of God amongst them, which our selves have found powerfull to our salvation. This moderation, so farre as we have kept it in preaching or printing, wee see no cause to repent of, but if you shew us cause why we should repent of it, wee shall desire to repent that we repented no sooner.

2. I know no man that reproacheth *Salem* for their separation, nor doe I believe that they doe separate. Howsoever if any doe reproach them for it, I thinke it a sinne meet to be censured, but not with so deepe a censure as to excommunicate all the Churches, or to separate from them before it doe appeare that they doe tolerate their members in such their causelesse reproachings. Wee confesse the errors of men are to be contended against, not with reproaches, but the sword of the Spirit; but on the other side, the failings of the Churches (if any be found) are not forthwith to be healed by separation. It is not Chirurgery, but Butchery, to heale every sore in a member with no other medicine but abscission from the body.

3. For my selfe, I acknowledge the words which you mention, that the way of separation is not a way that God hath prospered. But you much mistake, when you thinke I speake it for want of their outward countenance, peace and liberty. The truth is, they finde more favour in our native country then the way of reformation wherein we walke, which is commonly reproached by the name of Puritanisme. The meetings of the Separatists may be knowne to the Officers in the Courts and winked at, when the Conventicles of the puritans (as they call them) shall be hunted out with all diligence, and pursued with more violence then any law will justifie. But I said that God had not prospered the way of separation, because he hath not blessed it either with peace amongst themselves, or with growth of grace, such as erring through simplicitie and tenderesse of conscience have growne in grace, have growne also to discern their lawfull liberty to returne to the hearing of the word from English Preachers.

*Obj. U.* But this (you feare) is to condemne the witnesses of Jesus (the separate Churches in London and elsewhere) and our jealous God will visit us for such arrerages, yea the curse of his Angel from *Meroz* will fall upon us, because we come not forth to helpe Jehovah against the mighty, we pray not for them, wee come not at them, (but at Parishes frequently) yea we reproach and censure them.

*Answ.* The Lord Jesus never delivered that way of separation to which they beare witnesse, nor any of his Apostles after him, nor of his Prophets before him. So farre as in that way they hold or practise any holy truths, wee beare witnesse to them both in our profession and practise. The Angels curse in this case (wee blesse God) we doe not feare, because we doe come forth (according to the measure of grace given us) to helpe the Lord against the mighty, although we doe not come forth to helpe them against Jehovah. It is not to  
helpe



helpe Jehovah, but Satan against him, to withdraw the people of God from hearing the voyce of Christ which is preached in the evidence, and simplicity, and power of his Spirit in sundry Congregations (though they be Parishes) in our native Country. In which respect, though our people that goe over into England, choose rather to heare in some of the Parishes where the voyce of Christ is lifted up like a trumpet, then in the separated Churches (where some of us may speak by experience we have not found the like presence of Christ, or evidence of his Spirit) do not you marvaile, or stumble at it: Christs sheepe heare his voyce. If any carelessly heare at randome, making no difference betwixt the voyce of Christ and the voyce of strangers, or if they shall stoop to any defilements of themselves, that so they may heare a good Preacher; as I know none such, so neither doe any of us approve them in so doing.

That wee doe not pray for the separate Churches by name, it is because we cannot pray in faith for a blessing upon their separation, which we see not to be of God nor to be led to him. If any reproach them, I will not goe about to excuse it, onely they may doe well to consider, whether they also have not reproached others.

If there bee so many separate Churches in London and in other parts of the Kingdome (as you write) it is little comfort to the true servants of Christ to heare that either such inventions of men are multiplied, as like stumbling blockes doe turne any well minded men out of the way, or that such men being desirous of reformation, should stumble, not onely at the inventions of men, but for their sakes at the ordinances of the Lord; which appeareth the more evidently, because they separate not onely from hearing the word in all the Parishes, but also from fellowship (as your selfe say) both of the Church of *Plymouth*, and of that whereof Master *Lathurpe* was Pastor, and yet they refuse all the inventions of men, and choose to serve the Lord in his owne Ordinances onely. Now truly Sir, (to use your owne words) I feare this newes pleaseth not the Lord Jesus, and therefore the more inwardly sorry I am, that it pleaseth you rather to returne to them, not to helpe the Lord against the mighty, to wit, either against the high Prelates, or against the inventions of men, as you suppose, for that you might have done here, or in *Plymouth*, or in Master *Lathurpes* Congregation; but to helpe erring though zealous soules against the mightie Ordinances of the Lord, which whosoever stumble at shall be broken; for whosoever will not kisse the Sunne, (that is, will not heare and imbrace the words of his mouth) shall perish in their way, *Psal. 2. 12.*

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 may speak by experience we have not found the like presence of Christ  
 or evidence of his Spirit) do not you marvel or think at in Christ  
 these hear his voice. It may easily be heard at some times, making  
 no difference between the voice of Christ and the voice of man, or  
 or if they shall hope to any deliverance of themselves, that to they  
 may hear a good Teacher, and know none such, so neither do any  
 of us approve them in so doing.

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 parts of the Kingdom (as you say) a little comfort do the true  
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 because they separate not only from hearing the word in all the  
 Parishes, but also from fellowship (as you say) both of the  
 Church of England, and of that whereof Mr. L. was Pastor,  
 and yet they refuse all the inventions of men, and choose to live the  
 Lord in his own Ordinances only. Now surely, (to us your  
 own words) I like this new pleasure not the Lord Jesus, and  
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